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ABSTRACT

A report is presented of the Working Conference for Directors of State Studies of Adult Education, held in Clearwater, Florida from January 26-28, 1976. The conference provided a forum for issues emerging from State studies, study designs used, strategies for implementing recommendations, and future projections and was attended by over 40 people from throughout the country. Main issues included (1) advancing the state of the art of adult education needs analysis, and (2) policy development for adult and lifelong learning strategies. A brief overview describes the conference participants and their reactions. Conference accomplishments are outlined under the following headings: the present state of the art: rationale and methodology; broadening perspectives; implementation of State studies: moving toward lifelong learning. Final comments reiterate the conference as a fruitful beginning. The conference agenda and list of participants are included. (LH)

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POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION CONVENING AUTHORITY

A SYNTHESIS OF THE CLEARWATER CONFERENCE FOR DIRECTORS OF STATE STUDIES OF ADULT EDUCATION

by

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March, 1976

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Introduction

As a national policy on lifelong learning emerges, state studies of adult education are becoming more prevalent. In an effort to meet the needs of those involved in the design and implementation of these studies, the Postsecondary Education Convening Authority sponsored a Working Conference for Directors of State Studies of Adult Education at the Belleview Biltmore Hotel, Clearwater, Florida, on January 26 - 28, 1976. The Clearwater Conference provided a forum for communication on areas of mutual concern: issues emerging from state studies, study designs used, strategies for implementing recommendations and projections of the future for these studies.

The Postsecondary Education Convening Authority, supported by a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education, is a project of the Institute for Educational Leadership. PECA sponsors conferences, research efforts, task force groups and publications focusing on policy issues in postsecondary education.

The enclosed "Synthesis of the Clearwater Conference for Directors of State Studies of Adult Education," by James M. Heffernan, reflects the vast amount of information sharing and "brainstorming" that went on at Clearwater. Hopefully, new dialogues have now been established which are strengthening efforts presently underway, and will affect those that have yet to be undertaken. Also included, for your information, are the agenda and list of conference participants.

I want to give special thanks to Norman Kurland of New York and Franklin McLean of Connecticut who suggested the idea for this working conference and who devoted many hours to planning it.

Kenneth C. Fischer
Director
Postsecondary Education
Convening Authority

Institute for Educational Leadership
The George Washington University

March, 1976

March 16, 1976

INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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An important beginning occurred this January in Clearwater, Florida. The event was a first-time conference of directors of State studies of adult learner needs. The "beginning" was a substantial first step in 1) advancing the state-of-the-art of adult education needs analysis, and 2) policy development for adult and lifelong learning strategies. Participants in this two day interaction exchanged a great deal of information on the aims and the approaches to studying and responding to adult learner needs. Results: an enriched core of common knowledge.

Brief Overview

Over forty people came together at Clearwater to share ideas and experiences regarding current efforts at the State level to assess learning needs and programs for adults. Staff involved in State studies came from New York, Massachusetts, California, Connecticut, Colorado, Iowa, Nebraska, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, South Dakota, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, Washington

and Wisconsin. Staffers from State and Federal legislative offices were present, as were State and Federal education agency people and representatives of national associations. Conference sessions were largely participant-driven, with the sharing of expertise organized around several cogent themes. Conferees discovered early that -- with apologies to Walt Kelly's "Pogo" -- "we have met the cognoscenti, and they is us."

AAHE-NEXUS conducted a pre-conference telephone canvass of all participants so that specific areas of concern and specific resources and expertise could be introduced in the opening session of the conference. A Directory of this person-by-person information, as well as briefs of State studies available -- descriptions, findings, work-in-progress -- was reproduced, collated, and distributed to all conferees. Finally, over sixty items -- studies, reports, analyses, polemics, ephemerae -- comprise an ad hoc Conference Library, the "show and tell" tables, which assured that the useful fugitive literature in the field would be available to all in attendance.

Conferees indicated that the Clearwater meeting was not the typical dreary head-and-tail deadening affair. It was intensive and productive. Sessions were marked by full participation and minimal distractions; informal palaver lasted until the late hours. Topically, the group moved from "How and why are we doing State studies? to "What should be done, and how, in the future?"; from "What are the emergent and larger issues in lifelong learning?" to "How do we impact the broad public policies affecting lifelong learning? Sub-topic interest groups gathered around "Methods and Procedures - Now and Needed;" "Clarifying the Payoffs and Benefits of the Lifelong Learning 'Movement'."

The conference closed with a synthesis of the proceedings and, with a sense of "we've only just begun," plans for continuation of exchanges and projects.

Conference Accomplishments

To summarize the outcomes of this conference is a difficult task; it was an intense and time-filled affair. The single most striking impression is one of impressive movement, a productive progression of ideas and discussion from Monday to Wednesday toward greater sophistication and complexity. This accelerated coming-of-age emerged in three phases.

The first phase saw discussion moving quickly beyond the particulars of studies and details -- the survey of State studies hand-outs provided those answers -- and into the realm of broader generic issues. By the end of the day Tuesday, a number of new perspectives on the role and the process of state-level studies and on the lifelong learning enterprise itself had emerged.

The key characteristic at this point was "differentiation." The second phase was thus typified by the more complex questions of "what kinds of needs of what kinds of adults are met by what kinds of programs -- and what kinds of indicators and studies do we employ?"

This broadening of perspectives, built as it was on a base of commonly-shared ideas and language, then led to the third phase, a shift in concern from State studies to State or public policy strategies for implementing lifelong learning. Discussion Wednesday centered on larger contexts of human service programs, Federal/State priorities and national level resources and procedures for implementing "the Learning Society."

In sharply abbreviated form, here are some of the ideas generated in these three phases of the conference:

I. The Present State of the Art: Rationale and Methodology

A. Rationale, past and present, for conducting state-wide studies of adult education -- "Why do State studies?"

1. Formal, stated, or ostensible purposes:

- To assess needs; to assay existing programs, resources, facilities

- Part of a masterplan study

- For new basic knowledge and information

- From a concern for the underserved

- To study and develop greater use of existing institutions

- To document ideas for new services, to design new services

- To test marketability of programs

- Because of an absence of good data elsewhere

- Other studies outdated, too broad, too specialized.

2. Secondary purposes; less public equally compelling:

   - To keep and idea or a movement alive when there's no money for action

   - To serve as a rally point, a magnet for friends

   - To establish a base line of data, to certify "common knowledge"

   - To clarify agendas, terminology, focus

   - To force specificity in planning, policy-making

   - To help related human service agencies with programs

   - Piggy-backing data, information, findings

   - To attract outside funding support -- seeking funds for a study to lead to later program support.

3. Unstated, "political reality" purposes:

   - Studies also are done to delay action, reduce incipient conflict, or to hold up other proposals

   - To "smoke out" potential opponents, to provide a "stalking horse"

   - To build an image for a program -- the visibility, credibility, and seriousness-of-purpose aura of "working on a study."

4. After-the-fact rationale

   - To serve as a performance measure, to provide base-line criteria for later performance evaluation; e.g., a study's projections of program participation to be compared with later actual participation.

B. Methodology and Technique

- Primarily large sample surveys; interview/questionnaires
- Adult populations, business-industry-community-public services sectors
- Questions on demographies, interests and attitudes towards adult education, career plans, reactions to programs both existing and proposed, uses made of education
- Inventories of available programs and facilities, projected gaps/deficiencies in educational resources. The diversity of purposes and techniques of State studies was found to be surprisingly great, as were sponsorship, uses and impacts.

II. Broadening Perspectives

Benefiting from the synopses of State studies available and several participants' brief discussion of their own studies, the conferees came to realize that further re-invention of the wheel -- duplicating similar kinds of studies, State by State -- would be a waste of effort. It was apparent that a new generation of issues and variables should be included in future studies -- even if a particular State had not yet done a "first study." Essentially, the requisites of future studies called for by the conferees emphasized 1) greater differentiation with regard to conceptual and terminology distinctions, and 2) a greater awareness of the normative or public policy issues. Suggestions also were brought out emphasizing broader ranges of data and techniques to be employed in adult education studies. Some of the points raised:

A. Requisites for Future State Studies

Critical Distinctions and Definitions:

As a case in point, the simple phrase "meeting learner needs" involves many different categories:

1. What kinds of "adults?"

- Consider socio-economic class differences, race and sex-role differences, urban vs. rural populations, age group differences, employed vs. unemployed.

2. What kinds of "needs" -- consider personal development, job-training, career change, family and consumer education, basic and/or civic literacy.
(And, importantly, Who says that it's a need -- individuals? social agencies? legislators? business-industry? "educators?")

3. How to "meet needs?" What programs? -- are they delivery systems, outreach, advocacy? Focus on instruction, information/referral, counseling?
(And, importantly, who are program and service "providers" anyway? What is in the range of adult learning resources, from the formal -- institutional, social agencies, libraries/museums, Grange -- to the non-formal -- storefronts, streets, cooperatives, "Foxfire" and "Whole Earth" literature?).

4. Finally, it is important to differentiate among "wants," "needs," and "demands" for services and programs. What, really, are we studying? The bases of people's desires and expectations and their motivation to participate in education range from casual likes and interests to meeting basic "well-being" needs, to pressure group interests in particular programs.

   It is thus useful to distinguish between expressed and unexpressed needs, what people will pay for and what they can pay for, the degree to which groups will participate, and what might occur if the wanted/needed/demanded programs are not implemented.

B. Normative and public policy considerations:

- Much is already happening in this area; what are the regnant and the pregnant public policy imperatives relative to adult education?" Studies must attend to current policy trends, both Congressional and state-house, regarding stated priorities, "ought-to" statements and actual enactments. The principle normative issues revolve around "who should be served?" "who should pay?" "who should benefit?" "who should provide services?" "who should control postsecondary/adult/recurrent education systems?" "what should be the target of limited resources?"

- The overarching consideration here is a weighty philosophical issue: "What are the purposes of education?" Is education to serve individual development (personal, vocational), or economic progress (institutional, societal), or social change/stability? What is expected of adult/recurrent/lifelong education; will it always be expected to have instrumental rather than intrinsic worth? A knowledge of the perspectives on this issue held by interested parties -- learners, educators, politicians, agencies, institutions -- is essential in both formulating studies and in implementing recommendations.

C. Methodology and Technique - Future Considerations:

New variables, elements, and issues to be included:

- Users' participation rates in currently available learning programs..... conversely, characteristics of the users -- socio-economic status, age, needs -- of specific learning resources ....reactions to alternative programs, market-testing.

- Projections or scenarios about future needs conditions: analyses of state or regional characteristics, especially regarding employment and manpower needs, social and economic conditions, educative resources.....implications for adult education, by sectors of State, region, clientele.

- Evaluation components: not needs assessment, but how needs are being met....post hoc reactions by participants, employers..... criteria for a program's success, and relative conditions of success.....defining kinds of impacts, long and short term, of types of programs per types of clientele, relative costs and benefits.....focus on long-term impacts -- job changes, family life, "better citizen?".....determining costs of not providing learning opportunities, the "social damage" incurred if programs are not offered -- social, economic, health, personal costs..... determining costs of alternative "social investments" -- prisons, welfare system, mental institutions.

D. Techniques, sources, indicators suggested:

- Make greater use of objective data: users' actual behavior should be more fully assessed; e.g., willingness to pay, to participate, to follow-up; how people "vote with their feet."

- Depend less on subjective data: client sources should be used less to analyze needs, more for evaluation; e.g., to assess program effectiveness, from client's point of view through an "impacts index": "How it changed my life," vis á vis long and short-term or wanted and unwanted affects on job, personal and family domains.

- Make greater use of in-depth interview and projective techniques to supplement surveys.....expand data through individual follow-ups; longitudinal studies.....develop capabilities for trend analysis --similar data elements considered over time -- to provide policy-makers longer range behavioral data.....develop data comparability for base line studies with sufficient flexibility for subsequent changes, additions of elements.....make greater use of experimental techniques, to get at causal relationships between certain incentives and users' behaviors; e.g. "given this program and cost vs. this alternative cost and payoff, what do people do?".

- Make greater use of secondary resources and existing data, such as available from NCES, Labor Department, Office of Education and individual State offices for manpower education, regional planning, commerce, etc.....use other agencies' operating data, such as welfare departments, State library systems, extension services, etc.....use data and research from other disciplinary areas; e.g., economics, social work, sociology, geography, urban planning.

- Exchange information among researchers and policy analysts to enable others to decide not to make further State studies..... exchange contracting agencies' critiques of studies, how presented, how received.

III. Implementation of State Studies: Moving Toward Lifelong Learning

The final phase of the conference was a discussion of how the recommendations of studies get put into practice -- or at least into the hearings. This moved the focus from studies per se to broader political strategies regarding implementation of lifelong learning. The political savvy of conferees was notable; most had done battle in the political trenches, and had gained valuable practical experience. When generalized, this collective experience underscores three factors related to success in implementing study findings and promoting lifelong learning: 1) participation - involvement of all parties possible in studies and in planning 2) incrementalism - moving from the status quo in short, non-cataclysmic steps 3) honesty - openness, simple and direct, in one's intents and procedures.

A. Factors affecting success in implementing State studies

1. Involvement of relevant actors and decision-makers -- over time, from study design and write-up to recommendations, implementation, demonstration projects

   - emphasis on recognition of all actors' contributions, for commitment element and continuity

   - communication of findings, recommendations in several formats; i.e., relative to the needs and agendas of particular constituencies, agencies or legislators -- to speed translation of programs to actors' own self-interests and objectives.

2. Proceeding incrementally, realizing that overnight, "big bang" success is unlikely:

   - Process is more subtle, indirect, long-range
   - Avoiding grand designs
   - Coordinating a few "groups of groups" one step at a time
   - Pressing for easy departures from status quo, not new systems
   - Making certain changes administratively -- not all require new legislative bases; many structures already exist.

3. Maintaining honest, open relationships

   - Keeping sincere the emotional dedication to prompting recommendations
   - Working toward real benefits for clientele, not the agency; e.g., not "what do we need for them to need?"
   - Dealing with decision-makers and principals as persons, not positions
   - Keeping agendas open, clear
   - Avoiding over-emphasis on politics; standing on substance.

4. Making effective study presentations through understandable language, specific examples of needs and program activities and concrete, single-dimension recommendations

   - emphasis on facts and needs, and presentation of alternative recommendations, rather than imposition of decisions -- to allow for "backing and filling" by legislature or implementing agencies.

B. The "Relativistic Perspective": Putting State Studies in context

- Important to remember that a State study of learner needs is only one element, usually a small one, often a dispensable one, in the overall change process pursuant to lifelong learning
- Important to consider the larger systemic context of lifelong learning -- other agencies' agendas, the legislative and political environment, individuals' self-perceptions of "needs," existing structures and processes. Adult education as often responds to inferred needs as real needs; the case must be made that "this is a problem worthy of attention and resources" -- often a difficult task.

Some Final Comments

As this sketch of highlights suggests, the Clearwater Conference was indeed a fruitful beginning. Experiences exchanged, contacts made and projects begun have more than made the FECA efforts worthwhile. Important commitments already have been made: NCHEMS is involving conference participants in a project to resolve the "data and terminology dilemmas" within adult education; NCES has sought conferees' input data and analytical formulations being developed in this agency; a task force is being formed to prepare a synthesis of existing studies and related bibliographic material. Also, links with related interest groups have been set in motion: Education Commission of the States (and SHEEO), ERIC Clearinghouses, and the vocational and continuing education associations. Incidentally, influential action was underway at the conference itself; a number of participants worked on modifications and suggestions for the Mondale bill on Lifetime Learning. This activity not only gave an immediacy to the conference, it also produced a rich input to the Senate Committee's "mark-up" process later that week. Also proposed were separate state-level convenings of legislators, staffs and education agencies relative to the progress of lifelong learning programs; formats similar to the Clearwater meeting seem most suitable. Finally, information exchange through an inexpensive computer terminal link-up is being investigated.

Whatever the tangible outcomes of this conference will be, they will grow out of the sense of collective identity that the group has developed. The sharing of common problems, strategies for solutions, and some of the larger purposes of the lifelong learning vision -- and simply finding out who else to call in a pinch -- have been important parts of this process.

Final Agenda
for
Clearwater Conference

Monday, January 26:

5:00 p.m. - Social Hour
Ken Fischer's Room - Pick up conference folders and badges.

7:00 p.m. - Dinner
Main Dining Room

8:30 p.m. - First Session
PECA Conference Room
Introductions

Report from Jane Lichtman on pre-conference interviews

Building Conference Directory

10:00 p.m. - Adjourn

Tuesday, January 27:

7:30 a.m. - Breakfast

9:00 a.m. - Morning Session
PECA Conference Room

Discussion chaired by Norm Kurland

1) Why do State studies?

2) What are the public policy issues State studies address or should address?

12:30 p.m. - Lunch

1:30 p.m. - Afternoon Session
PECA Conference Room

Discussion chaired by Frank McLean

Design and Technique of State studies:

-- Funding, design, coordination of planning, staffing, impact analysis, etc.

Tuesday, anuary 27, Con't:

3:45 p.m. - Discussion of alternative formats for the evening session

4:00 p.m. - Opportunity for informal exchange among participants

5:00 p.m. - Social Hour
Ken Fischer's Room

7:00 p.m. - Dinner
Main Dining Room

8:00 p.m. - Evening Session

Format to be determined by conferees.

Wednesday, January 28:

7:30 a.m. - Breakfast
Main Dining Room

9:00 a.m. - Morning Session
PECA Conference Room

Reports from Conferees on Informal Sessions
or
What's the Best Idea You Picked Up in the Corridor Last Night?

To formalize the good interactions that happen in the corridors, this session will provide an opportunity for all of us to share the special insights gained from each of our informal discussions. You might think of it as a way of tuning in to a multi-channel grapevine -- pick up whatever you can use!

10:30 a.m. - Implementation of Recommendations from State studies

12:00 - Adjourn Morning Session
Check out of rooms

12:45 p.m. - Lunch

1:45 p.m. - Final session
Pool Studio

A. Synthesis of Conference by Jim Heffernan

B. Discussion -- Where to Go From Here?

3:00 p.m. - Adjournment.

Final List of Participants

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Clearwater, Florida
January 26 - 28, 1976

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